

# **Dyslexia Basics**

## International Dyslexia Association

### **What is dyslexia?**

Dyslexia is a language-based learning disability. Dyslexia refers to a cluster of symptoms, which result in people having difficulties with specific language skills, particularly reading. Students with dyslexia may experience difficulties in other language skills such as spelling, writing, and speaking. Dyslexia is a life-long status, however, its impact can change at different stages in a person's life. It is referred to as a learning disability because dyslexia can make it very difficult for a student to succeed academically in the typical instructional environment.

### **What causes dyslexia?**

The exact causes of dyslexia are still not completely clear, but anatomical and brain imagery studies show differences in the way the brain of a dyslexic person develops and functions. Moreover, people with dyslexia have been found to have problems with discriminating sounds within a word, a key factor in their reading difficulties. Dyslexia is not due to either lack of intelligence or a desire to learn; with appropriate teaching methods dyslexics can learn successfully.

### **How widespread is dyslexia?**

Current studies suggest that 15-20% of the population has a reading disability. Of those, 85% has dyslexia. Dyslexia occurs in people of all backgrounds and intellectual levels. In addition, dyslexia runs in families; dyslexic parents are very likely to have children who are dyslexic. Some people are identified as dyslexic early in their lives, but for others their dyslexia goes unidentified until they get older. People who are very bright can be dyslexic. They are often gifted in areas that do not require strong language skills, such as art, computer science, design, drama, electronics, math, mechanics, music, physics, sales, and sports.

### **What are the effects of dyslexia?**

The impact that dyslexia has is different for each person and depends on the severity of the condition and the approaches of the remediation. The most common effects are problems with reading, spelling, and writing. Some dyslexics do not have much difficulty with early reading and spelling tasks but do experience great problems when more complex language skills are required, such as grammar, understanding textbook material, and writing essays.

People with dyslexia can also have problems with spoken language. They may find it difficult to express themselves clearly, or to fully comprehend what others mean when they speak. Such language problems are often difficult to recognize, but they can lead to major problems in school, in the workplace, and in relating to other people. The effects of dyslexia reach well beyond the classroom.

Dyslexia can also affect a person's self-image. Students with dyslexia often end up feeling "dumb" and less capable than they actually are. After experiencing a great deal of stress due to academic problems, a student may become discouraged about continuing in school.

### **How is dyslexia diagnosed?**

A formal evaluation is needed to discover if a person is dyslexic. The evaluation assesses intellectual ability, information processing, psycho-linguistic processing, and academic skills. It is used to determine whether or not a student is reading at the expected level, and takes into account the individual's family background and overall school performance. The testing can be conducted by trained school or outside specialists.

### **What are the signs of dyslexia?**

The problems displayed by individuals with dyslexia involve difficulties in acquiring and using language -- reading and writing letters in the wrong order is just one manifestation of dyslexia and does not occur in all cases. Other problems experienced by dyslexics include:

- Learning to speak
- Organizing written and spoken language
- Learning letters and their sounds
- Memorizing number facts
- Spelling
- Reading
- Learning a foreign language
- Correctly doing math operations

Not all students who have difficulties with these skills are dyslexic. Formal testing is the only way to confirm a diagnosis of suspected dyslexia.

### **How is dyslexia treated?**

Dyslexia is a life-long condition. With proper help people with dyslexia can learn to read and/or write well. Early identification and treatment is the key to helping dyslexics achieve in school and in life. Most people with dyslexia need help from a teacher, tutor, or therapist specially trained in using a multisensory, structured language approach. It is important for these individuals to be taught by a method that involves several senses (hearing, seeing, touching) at the same time. Many individuals with dyslexia need one-on-one help so that they can move forward at their own pace. For students with dyslexia, it is helpful if their outside academic therapists work closely with classroom teachers.

Schools can implement academic modifications to help dyslexic students succeed. For example, a student with dyslexia can be given extra time to complete tasks, or help with taking notes, and/or appropriate work assignments. Teachers can give taped tests or allow dyslexic students to use alternative means of assessment. Students can benefit from listening to books-on-tape and from writing on computers.

Students may also need help with emotional issues that sometimes arise as a consequence of difficulties in school. Mental health specialists can help students cope with their struggles.

### **What are the rights of a dyslexic person?**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) define the rights of students with dyslexia and other specific learning disabilities. These individuals are legally entitled to special services to help them overcome and accommodate their learning problems. Such services include education programs designed to meet the needs of these students. The Acts also protect people with dyslexia against unfair and illegal discrimination.

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